

EARTH MOTHER

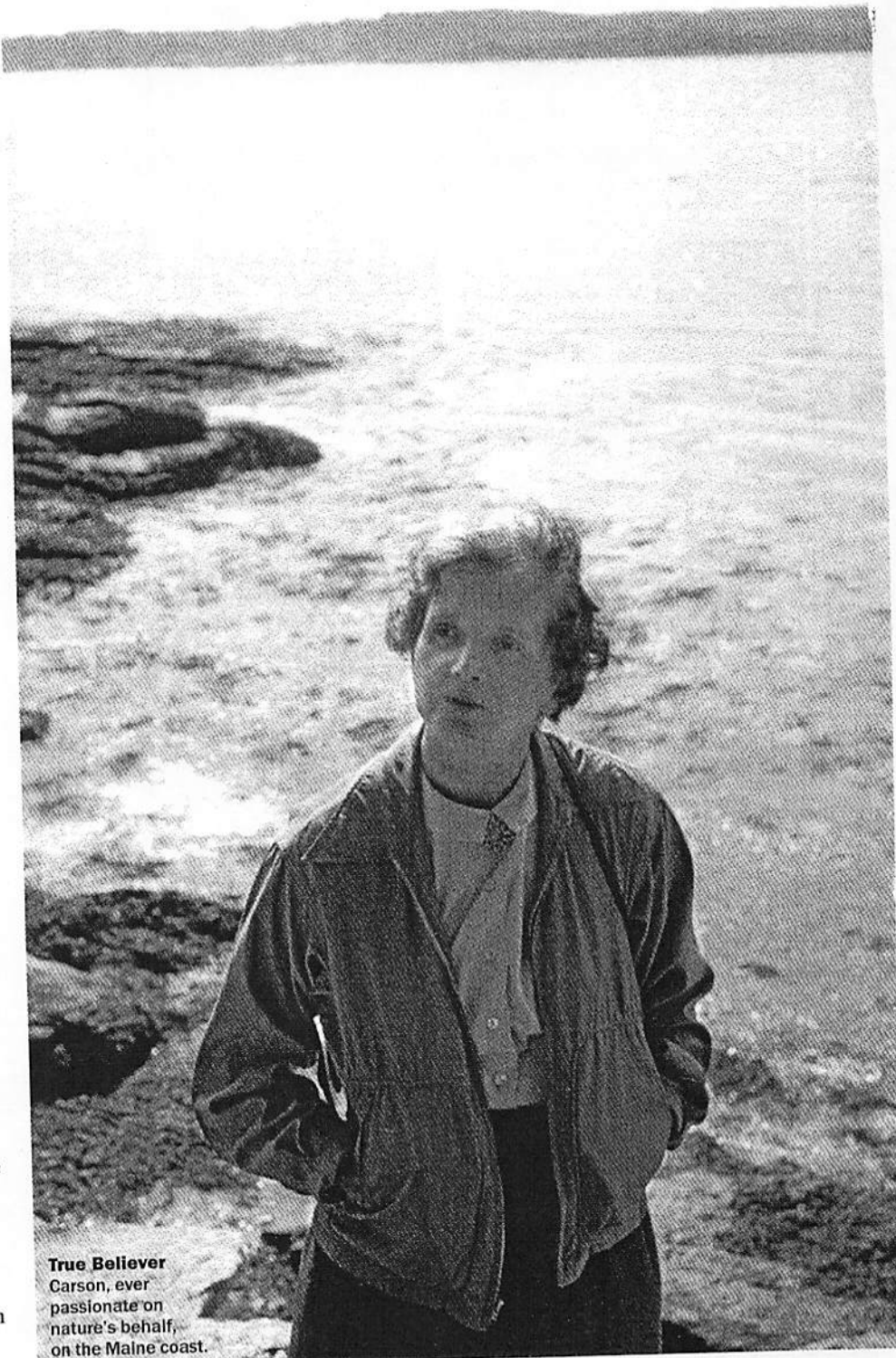
# Rachel Carson

Her insightful mind, beautiful prose, and quiet courage are an inspiration for modern environmental activists.

**F**orty-three years ago this month, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* was published. The 55-year-old author, a biologist and naturalist, was shy and reserved but uncompromising in her view that the planet was in trouble. "I think we're challenged as mankind has never been challenged before to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature, but of ourselves," she said. Her forthright call to activism became the bedrock of today's environmental movement.

The book's opening depicts a fictitious American town where the landscape is barren and all life has ceased. Pesticides used indiscriminately to control insect populations have polluted the water, destroyed the wildlife, and killed the plants. "No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life...the people had done it to themselves," Carson wrote. Her book ignited public outrage, which in turn contributed to the founding of the EPA. It also prompted a wave of legislation and led to the domestic ban on DDT, a pesticide that has been linked to cancer and, 30 years after the ban, still lingers in our bodies.

Carson, who died in 1964, was not the type to seek controversy. Growing up in rural Pennsylvania, she learned from her mother a deep affection for all creatures. After college, she went to work as an aquatic biologist for the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries. It took her



**True Believer**  
Carson, ever passionate on nature's behalf, on the Maine coast.

four years to write *Silent Spring*, her fourth book (after *Under the Sea Wind*, *The Sea Around Us*, and *The Edge of the Sea*); it reveals not just her deep respect for nature but also her meticulous research and fieldwork—the sources for it alone fill 55 pages.

Facing a storm of opposition from

the chemical industry, Carson held firm. Humans must rethink their relationship to the planet, she believed: "Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective." —*Christopher Carbone*